

FRANK



READE

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OVER THE ANDES WITH FRANK READE, JR., IN HIS NEW AIR-SHIP; OR, WILD ADVENTURES IN PERU. *By "NONAME."*



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CHAPTER I.

THE NEW AIR-SHIP.

What boy has not indulged in dreams of some day being able to master the art of flying in the air? What youth has not felt the fascination of a balloon ascension?

From early years we look upon the blue sky above as a mystic, wonderful and unexplored region. We feel our utter inability to cope with the question of overcoming that specific law of gravitation which prevents our flying in mid-air which is so simple a matter for the birds, and yet there is not one of us but has ever had faith that the problem would some day be solved.

How it has been solved, and the outcome of that wonderful feat we shall endeavor to depict in the incidents of this story.

It had become a famous and well-known fact that a certain talented young American had mastered the problem.

Frank Reade, Jr., a native of Readestown, and by nature, tastes and adoption an inventor, had given to the world the Submarine Boat and the Electric Air-Ship. These triumphs placed his name high upon the roll of fame.

But ambition was one of his greatest attributes.

Not content yet, the famous young inventor who had acquired immense wealth with which to insure success had embarked upon a new project, the like of which the world had never before heard of.

"This time," he declared, "I intend to build an air-ship which will be able to carry a dozen or more persons around the world if need be. It shall excel all previous efforts!"

As the report went out to this effect, the whole country became agog with interest.

From near and far letters were showered upon the young inventor, couched in the most varied of terms and containing the most unreasonable of importunities.

Scientists wished the privilege of journeying a few thousand miles toward the moon. Gold seekers depicted splendid chances for gaining gold from mountain mines inaccessible in any other way.

Thousands of these letters, some couched in threatening terms in case of a refusal, were received.

One implied a threat to destroy the air-ship and the machine works at Readestown, if a committee from the Dynamite Union were not permitted to sail over the big cities and destroy the houses of the millionaires of the country with electric bombs.

Of course Frank consigned all these to the waste basket.

But yet they bothered him not a little, and for fear some insane crank might work harm, a heavy guard was kept over the Readestown works.

The great air-ship was finished.

Frank had christened it the "Era," as it really marked an era in the problem of sky navigation.

It rested upon the stocks in the great yard of the machine works. A description of the aerial wonder might not be out of place, before setting forth further the exciting incidents of our story.

First, Frank Reade, Jr., realized that it was necessary to consider the question of supreme lightness.

He therefore abandoned the idea of suspensory helices or rotascopes, and declared:

"I believe a lighter and swifter ship can be built upon the storage of gas principle. By constructing a reservoir sufficiently strong to resist expansion, I believe that the elevating power can be maintained with lateral wings."

Accordingly, first he constructed the gas reservoir.

This was made full fifty feet long and cylindrical in shape. Of the best oiled silk six cases each within the other. Frank skillfully arranged a wire frame or belt, which should keep the gas bag always erect.

Then netting was skillfully wove over this; the bottom of the netting and the bag as well was fastened to a long platform of thinly rolled but stiff steel.

Below this was another platform with light standards and partitions which made the cabins and engine room of the air-ship.

This also in weight acted as ballast.

Upon either side of the platform a guard rail extended the whole length.

Four huge wings upon steel frames and made of powerful texture silk were projected from the sides of the air-ship to aid in its buoyancy.

These wings were driven by an upright cylinder and a version of walking beam, giving regular action and symmetry of movement.

Forward was a pilot house with windows of heaviest plate glass; also a powerful searchlight.

At the bow was the rudder, a huge expanse of silk upon a frame, the turning of which to the right or left deflected the course of the air-ship.

It was a marvel of beautiful proportions and effect.

The interior of the cabin was rich and luxurious.

All the necessary appointments and books, weapons and ammunition, richly draped furniture and cabinets, soft couches and everything in a palatial sense.

In one compartment was the galley or cook-room, where Pomp excelled.

Pomp was a curious little negro, with a vein of darky wit as bright as the scintillations of a star.

He had long been in the employ of Frank Reade, Jr., and was faithful and true to his duties.

There was also Barney O'Shea, a genuine type of Irishman, with a comical mug and a shock of red hair which at once established his identity. Barney was a skilled electrician and a good engineer.

These two employees Frank thought much of and they were his companions in all his travels.

And jolly fellows they were, too, though a bit given to playing jokes upon each other, which we shall discover in the course of our story.

The famous air-ship was just finished when Barney came into Frank's private draughting room, and said:

"Shure, sor, an' the Era is all finished, I understand!"

"Yes, Barney," replied Frank. "What do you think of her?"

"Begorra, it's a foine bit av machinery she is."

"I think so!"

"Shure an' yez will be afther taking a thrip in her afore long, sor!"

"Yes," replied Frank. "At a very early date, I hope."

"An' may I ask have yez decided phwere to go, sor?"

"Well, not exactly. There are many parts of the world accessible. Perhaps we will go around the world!"

"Shure, sor, thin eud I make a bit av a suggestion to yez?"

"Why, certainly!" declared Frank. "What may it be, Barney?"

"I 'ave a cousin, he's a Frenchman, be the way—yez see it wuz this way! Me mother's sister was afther marrying a frog ater, and shure they had wan boy, an' fer a compromise they called him Pathrick De Frontenac. Arrah, he's a gossoon av a boy, an' there's ivery bit mother in him."

Frank could not help smiling.

"Well, that is truly a wonderful combination!" he declared. "I never before heard of that kind of a marriage."

Barney scratched his head:

"I niver was in love wid the French meself," he said, "but I'd niver own a sister as wud marry an Eyetalian."

And Barney made a grimace, and executed a quickstep in a manner which boded no good for the sons of sunny Italy.

"All right!" said Frank. "Now let's get down to facts."

"All roight, sor," agreed Barney. "Me Cousin Pathrick, sor, has been for tin years an explorer in South Ameriky."

He has thramped all over the Andes Mountains, sor, an' he is afther askin' me to ask ye if ye wouldn't think av thryin' a thrip over the Andes yesilf, sor!"

"Over the Andes!" exclaimed Frank. "Well, that is not a bad idea. But why is he so interested?"

"Shure, sor, he kin tell yez that betther than I kin. He's this moment outside, sor, an' if yez will do him the favor he'll talk wid yez about it."

"Well," said Frank, reflectively. "I'll see him, Barney." Show him in."

"All roight, sor!"

The Celt disappeared. A moment later a tall, wiry built man, with an olive complexion and shrewd Irish features entered.

He had the unmistakable stamp of a traveler, and was evidently a man of refinement and education.

"Mr. Reade, I am honored to meet you!" he said, politely. "I presume Barney has told you all about me?"

Frank was at once favorably impressed with his visitor.

"Yes," he replied. "You have traveled in the Andes?"

"I have!"

"Barney tells me that you found a great deal of interest there."

Patrick De Frontenac replied earnestly:

"I believe that you, Mr. Reade, with your air-ship, can give to the world one of the greatest benefits to science that the world has ever known!"

Frank was interested.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "And all this in the Andes?"

"Yes!"

"Pray what may it be?"

Patrick De Frontenac drew from his pocket a number of maps.

These were skillfully drawn, and were evidently of his own construction. He placed his finger upon a certain part of the Andes range.

"There," he said, "is a part of the world which has never been explored. There are hundreds of square miles of wonderful region inhabited by a strange people, who are beyond the reach of the ordinary explorer."

CHAPTER II.

THE EXPLORER'S STORY.

De Frontenac's declaration was an earnest one and impressed Frank Reade, Jr., deeply.

Moreover, the young inventor was at once interested.

"An unexplored region!" he declared. "Why, can it not be reached by the ordinary methods?"

"For the reason that the mountain peaks intervene and the cliffs and precipices so completely shut in, that the place is inaccessible."

"Indeed!"

"It is true."

"And this region is inhabited?"

"By a strange people, perhaps descendants of the Incas. They will not venture out of their fastnesses, and their life and country is one of the hidden mysteries of the world. You, and you alone, can solve it."

"I beg your pardon," said Frank, "but if nobody has ever visited this strange region, how is it known for a fact that this state of affairs exists there?"

"Easy enough," replied De Frontenac. "One of the strange race was captured one day, having found his way down into the valley. He was never able to get back, and affiliating with the native Indians, became one of them. These wonderful stories were told by him."

"Do you consider this authentic?"

"It is the common belief of the country. I see no reason for disbelieving it until the unknown region is explored."

Frank was more interested than he cared to show.

He studied De Frontenac earnestly, and finally made up his mind that the French-Irish adventurer was honest in his statement.

"You are right, De Frontenac, in one thing," he declared. "The solution of the problem can be accomplished by the air-ship."

"Just so!" cried De Frontenac, eagerly, "and it will be a great aid to science, and deeply satisfy me as well. I can assure you that I am sincere, and my character is good."

"I believe you," said Frank, now thoroughly convinced. "I will say, De Frontenac, that I am much interested in your story. As my cruise in the air is mainly in quest of adventure, this seems to afford a good incentive."

"Joy!" cried the explorer, wildly, "then you will go, Mr. Reade?"

"I will consider the matter," said Frank; "and let you know to-morrow. Your address——"

"I am stopping at the Palace Hotel, this city."

"Then I will send you a message in the morning!" declared Frank; "you may rest easy till then."

"On the contrary I shall not rest easy!" laughed De Frontenac; "I shall not close my eyes in sleep until I hear your answer. Know that it is the aim of my life to explore that region in the Andes!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, more than ever interested.

"Well, you may expect an answer from me in the morning."

De Frontenac went away like on in an ecstasy.

Soon after Barney came rushing in. Frank was studying some South American maps.

"Begorra, Misther Frank!" cried the Celt, excitedly. "Will yez be afther sayin' yez will go? Shure ye'll niver be sorry I'm sure."

"I think we shall, Barney!" said Frank.

"Whurroo!"

"Wait!"

"Well, sor?"

"Be sure you have everything shipshape and in readiness aboard the Era. I may decide to take a sudden start."

"I'll do that, sor!"

Barney rushed out into the yard. He was going so rapidly that he did not heed a dark form coming out of a passage between the buildings.

It was Pomp, and in his hands he carried a brush and a pail of whitewash.

The darky was going to whiten the back yard fence.

He had a literal mania for whitening things. This might have arisen from the fact that the whitewashing had once been his trade.

He would even have whitewashed the new air-ship if Frank would have allowed him.

"It's mighty quare, naygur, phy it is yez air so fond av a white color when yez air so black yesilf!" said Barney, one day in a facetious manner.

"Jes' bekase I likes de contrast, chile," retorted Pomp, with a grin.

Now Barney was crossing the yard so rapidly that he did not see either Pomp or the whitewash pail or the brush.

As a result the first thing he heard was a sharp yell.

"Hi, dar, I'ish, don' yo' steer into me! Yo' git de wust ob it! Look out dar!"

But Barney went biff, bang into the darky.

Pomp tumbled, tried to regain himself, but fell.

And the whitewash pail tilted up, was emptied like a flash, and full into his face.

Barney stood on his head and saw a million bright stars. But he was the first to arise.

The sight he beheld was amusing in the extreme.

There lay the darky spluttering and gasping and white as chalk, for the white liquid had literally changed his sable hue.

"Golly fo' glory! What am dat?" he spluttered, struggling to regain his feet. "Wha' yo' done, yo' fool I'ish-man?"

Barney was for a moment aghast, but as he saw the comical aspect of the darky, he could not help a shriek of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "On me worrud yez are a beauty, naygur. Shure, yez oughtn't to kick, fer it's a white man I've med av yez!"

"I jes' make a pancake ob yo'!" spluttered the darky, springing to his feet. "Yo' jes' do dat on puppose!"

"Bejabers, don't yez tell me that, naygur!"

"Yo' did, an' I gib yo' a good return fo' it!" yelled Pomp.

Down went the darky's head like a battering ram.

Forward he darted, and before Barney could get out of the way, the darky's head took him full in the abdomen.

It was like being struck by a cannon ball.

The Celt went down as if shot.

He was for an instant winded, but his Irish blood was up, and he quickly gained his feet.

"Whurroo, yez black blaygard!" he yelled, "I'll have the loife av yez fer this! Whurroo!"

But Pomp having revenge darted back into the passage. He got the start and eluded Barney, who presently gave up the pursuit.

Rubbing his stomach ruefully he returned to the yard, saying:

"On me sowl I have it in fer that naygur now. An' it's a fool I am av I don't have it out wid him."

Then away he went to get the Era in shape for the projected cruise.

Meanwhile, Frank Reade, Jr., had been busily studying the maps.

He was satisfied finally that such a region as De Frontenac described might really exist.

"At least we will make the trip," he finally decided.

He arose to his feet, when there came a tap on the door. Frank gave a start.

Nobody was ever admitted to the yard without first stating their errand, or being announced by Barney or Pomp.

Yet, here was some visitor who had entered unheralded.

Then Frank remembered that he himself had carelessly left the outer gate open.

Frank opened the door and stood face to face with a man whom he had never seen before.

He was tall and dark, with shrewd piercing eyes, and a peculiar nervous manner. He regarded Frank searchingly and said:

"Is this Mr. Reade?"

"It is!" replied Frank.

The fellow tendered Frank a card. The young inventor glanced at it and gave a little start.

"Osman Dyke, Detective,

"New York City."

"You will see that I am a detective," said Dyke, politely, "therefore my business with you is important."

"Very good, sir!" agreed Frank. "What can I do for you?"

"I think you are the only man in the world who can solve my case for me," said the detective.

"Indeed!"

"That is why I have come to you. But first and before I attempt to enlist your sympathies, let me tell you my story."

"I shall be glad to hear it," said Frank. "Pray go on!"

"The story is a strange one, you will admit," said the detective—"it is a powerful illustration of the power of man's greed."

"Two brothers embarked from New York City for Rio two years ago. Their names were John and Allan Burton."

"They were fortune seekers. Allan was a bluff, large hearted fellow, and John a shrewd, selfish and egotistical chap."

"After reaching Rio they for a time were in business together in fruits, then they quarrelling, Allan gave up his share in the firm and went off with an exploring party into the interior."

"The reports say that he reached the Andes and there found a diamond mine. From this he took out some magnificent stones and returned to Rio. Their sale made him a wealthy man."

"He returned to New York. His brother John followed him. Allan married the girl of his youthful love and lived happily with his wife in a fine residence on Fifth avenue."

"John was insanely jealous of his brother, and angry that he should have acquired such wealth while he yet remained poor."

"This led to recriminations, and he demanded that his brother should help him. Allan being of a generous nature, forgave his brother's mistreatment of the past and helped him."

"Gradually the wily John got Allan involved in various speculations. Day by day fresh pledges were obtained to back up a tottering enterprise."

"The end was obvious. One day the crash came. Allan Burton failed and everything was swept away. He was reduced to penury."

"This was all upon his brother's account. The blow was heavy, yet he would have faced it bravely but for a most terrible discovery."

"This was that his brother suddenly blossomed out with money in plenty, which was sheer evidence of terrible duplicity and treachery."

CHAPTER III.

SOUTHWARD BOUND.

"The truth was, John had been at the bottom of all of Allan's troubles and had profited by them."

"He had, in short, neatly fleeced his brother and turned the tables upon him in the most cowardly manner."

"At first Allan was stunned with this realization. Then he said to his wife:

"'Ellen, we are ruined! John has beaten me!'

"'He is a villain and a thief!' cried the wife, forcibly. 'I demand that you ask for satisfaction of him!'

"Allan at once went to John and accused him of treachery. The latter only laughed and sneered bitterly. This stung Allan to the quick."

"'I will have my rights,' he declared, 'in a court of law. I believe you are liable.'"

"At this John defied him. But Allan was now in earnest. Able counsel was employed, and the strange suit, brother versus brother, was brought."

"It was bitterly fought out in the courts, but John's dishonesty was shown, and the court promptly ordered that restitution be made to Allan."

"John was under bonds and obliged to comply. But his wrath and hatred of his wronged brother was intense."

"The next time they met was upon the street. A brief altercation ensued. John's black temper got the best of him and he rushed upon Allan, dealing him a blow which crushed his skull."

"The murderer escaped. He managed to get aboard a South American steamer, and was tracked to Rio and thence for some ways into the interior."

"But from that day to this he has not been heard from. The young wife was frantic with grief and horror. Mrs. Burton mourns her murdered husband, but lives with only one end in view, and that is revenge."

"She will track the murderer down and bring him to justice if it takes a lifetime. I have her authority to search the world over for him. This is the story."

A moment of silence reigned as the detective concluded this vivid and graphic recital.

Frank Reade, Jr., had been deeply impressed, and now declared:

"Really, sir, that was a very tragic affair. I certainly hope you will succeed, but——"

"Well?"

"In what manner can I hope to give you aid?"

The detective leaned forward.

"You alone can help me," he said, earnestly. "If it is true that you possess an air-ship which can travel the world over——"

"It is."

"Then it is in your power to help this sorrowing woman to gain justice for the loss of her husband."

Frank was deeply impressed.

"How can I track the villain down?"

"The fastnesses of the Andes are mighty, and a man could hide there for a lifetime and never be discovered by ordinary means."

"True."

"But with your air-ship——"

"I understand. You wish me to go there in quest of the murderer?"

"Yes, and bring him back to a just trial in the courts of this country. If you will do this you will be doing an act of justice and philanthropy. The suffering widow has but a fragment of her husband's fortune left, but she will give it to you if you will. I don't know what plans you have made, or whether you intended journeying in your air-ship, but if you will undertake this task you will win everlasting gratitude."

Frank Reade, Jr., was silent and thoughtful a moment.

It could be seen that the detective was extremely nervous and anxious.

Suddenly Frank arose.

"My friend," he said, "I would have a heart of stone if I did not accede to your request——"

"Oh, God bless you!" almost screamed the detective.

"Wait! Let me tell you that it was my intention to go to South America, anyway."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do. I am going to make a sky exploration of the Andes. There are many parts of those mountains as yet unexplored and misunderstood. A scientist will go with me, and we shall explore from the sky all that great region. A thorough map of all will be made."

"Wonderful!"

"Yet it is feasible for me to make a side issue of your case. I will endeavor to find your man."

"A thousand thanks!" cried the detective. "You will be sure to do that! This will be joyful news to the wife!"

Then Osman Dyke paused.

Frank gazed at him keenly, and smiled as he read the impulse of his bosom.

"I understand you," he said.

"Do you?"

"Yes; you are anxious to go aboard the air-ship."

"Will it be too much to ask? I can instantly identify John Burton, you know."

"It is settled," said Frank. "We will have two passengers—you and Mr. De Frontenac. I hope you two will be friends."

"You cannot know my joy!" cried Dyke. "Now I will go at once and wire Mrs. Burton, who is anxiously waiting."

"That would be best."

At the door the detective, whose face was radiant, turned.

"When will the start be made?" he asked.

"At as early a day as possible!" replied Frank. "Give me your address, and I will wire you!"

"Detective Headquarters, New York City."

"Very well! Hold yourself in readiness."

Then Dyke was gone.

Frank took two or three turns up and down the room.

"Well!" he muttered, "we shall have objects enough to attain upon this trip. I hope we will succeed!"

What a thrilling future to look forward to? Surely the voyagers of the "Era," the sky explorer, were to be envied.

Preparations were made as speedily as possible for the departure.

When the day came at last the great air-ship rested upon a platform in the yard of the machine works.

De Frontenac and Dyke were on hand.

Barney was in the engine-room, and Pomp at the wheel. Frank Reade, Jr., and the two travelers stood on the deck.

The people of Readestown had turned out en masse to see the wonderful flight of the Era.

Some skeptical ones in the crowd pooh-hooed the invention and predicted that it would never rise.

But at the appointed hour Frank gave final orders to his foreman, and then cutting the anchor rope, shouted:

"Press Lever No. 10, Barney!"

"All roight, sor!"

The next moment the air-ship, freed of the detaining ropes, rose into the air like a bird.

The huge wings began to act and beat the air strongly.

Up, up went the Era until the city of Readestown looked like a collection of toy houses.

Guns could be heard booming below, and even the faint shouts of the people.

The voyagers clung to the rail and gazed with interest upon the dizzy scene below.

Then the great propeller began to work, and like a huge bird the Era sailed away.

Through the air she sped to the southward. The novelty of the experience was most charming to De Frontenac and Dyke.

"Upon my word!" cried the explorer, "nothing can exceed this!"

"Indeed, it is the greatest of all privileges!" declared the detective. "Wonderful beyond all description!"

"That is true!"

Frank had decided to make a stright line across the Gulf of Mexico to Venezuela.

Thence he intended to cross the United States of Colombia and proceed southward along the eastern side of the Andes, into Peru.

The explorer, De Frontenac, had described the direction to take from the head waters of the Amazon.

Across a part of the great United States the air-ship rapidly flew.

At noon the next day, the waters of the Gulf were sighted.

But they were not for long in view. A terrific gale blew from the southeast, and the storm clouds hung in an impenetrable pall below. The air-ship had safely risen above this warring of the elements.

It was a remarkable spectacle, and being new to the detective and the explorer, they gazed upon it with much interest.

"Indeed it surpasses anything I have ever seen!" declared De Frontenac. "I have heard this spectacle described by balloonists, but never expected to see it."

"If I were only a poet, what inspiration I might get!" declared Dyke. "It is a grand sight!"

And indeed it was.

Below were the angry tossing clouds, and ever and anon the boom of thunder shivered the air.

Above, the sun was shining brightly in a blue sky.

But some hours later the storm passed away to the eastward, and the waters of the gulf once more rolled below.

Frank now shouted to Barney:

"Let the air-ship down a bit!"

Barney at once obeyed.

There was strong need of this, for the air at that tremendous height was so exceedingly rare, that breathing was most uncomfortable.

So the Era descended into a more comfortable stratum.

For hours the air-ship sailed on over the boundless waste. Land had faded from sight, and vessels were visible only at random intervals.

Thus matters were when the first casualty of the voyage, and which came near nipping it in the bud, occurred.

De Frontenac, Barney, Frank and Dyke, the detective, were upon the lower stage talking when suddenly a startling thing occurred.

A whirring noise came from the engine room.

"What is that?" exclaimed Frank, in alarm.

The young inventor sprang for the pilot-house door. There was need of haste for awful peril threatened.

"My God!" screamed Dyke and De Frontenac, in horrified chorus. "We are falling into the sea."

CHAPTER IV.

A CLOSE CALL.

This was true.

The air-ship was descending gradually but certainly toward the tossing waters below.

The great wings had ceased to act and the propeller had come to a stop.

What was the cause was a mystery.

The great wings outspread, however, acted with parachute effect and prevented a violent descent.

Yet to fall into the sea was not a pleasant thing to contemplate.

The powerful waves would no doubt batter the air-ship in pieces.

Destruction would be certain.

Pomp had come out of the galley excitedly. He shouted: "Golly, Marse Frank, something hab jes' broken in de in-jine room! I done fink we am done fo' now!"

"Get out the portable boat, Pomp!" shouted Frank. "Lively, you and Barney! We don't want to drown!"

Foreseeing a possible contingency of this kind, Frank had stowed away aboard the air-ship a pontoon rubber boat, made in folding fashion, to occupy as little space as possible.

This Barney and Pomp now rushed to bring out.

"What can we do, Mr. Reade?" cried De Frontenac.

"Yes," chimed in Dyke.

"Keep cool!" returned the young inventor. "When the ship strikes, the water get into the boat."

Then into the engine room Frank quickly dashed.

A glance showed him at once what was the trouble.

The machinery was at a dead stop, but the dynamos were buzzing with awful fury.

He quickly shut off the battery, and, then, quick as a flash, set at work to repair the trouble.

Over the main cogs of the propeller shaft was a small iron shelf upon which some wrenches were placed ready for use.

The motion of the ship had jarred one of them off and it had fallen into the cogs.

Of course this obstructed and instantly checked them.

The propeller and the wings ceased to work, and the storage of gas in the reservoir not being sufficient to support the air-ship, settled.

In a few moments it would be in the water.

Quick as he could, Frank turned on the generator cocks, and fresh gas flowed into the reservoir as fast as it could generate.

Then he seized an iron bar and pried the wrench out of the cogs.

But they were a little twisted and yet refused to work. Frank saw that it would require an hour's work to repair them.

Horror seized him.

It seemed as if the air-ship must go into the water. The terrible waves would be apt to beat it to pieces before it could be made to rise again.

The gas, of course, generated slowly, and it would be some time before enough would be provided to make the air-ship go up.

Yet Frank pluckily went to work; he grasped his tools and began to unlock the cogs.

As he did so he felt spray come in through the window. He abandoned his work to rush to the window a moment and shout:

"Get aboard the boat, all of you; we must lighten her all we can!"

But Barney already had the pontoon in the water and they all climbed into it.

There was no doubt but that this lightened the air-ship much.

Frank saw that the gas reservoir was swelling and the machine was stationary right on the surface of the water.

The waves rolled over the lower stage or platform, and at times it was entirely submerged.

But no serious damage was being done by this.

Frank realized with a thrill that if the sea did not rise higher the fresh gas in the reservoir would yet lift the air-ship up to a point of safety.

And, in fact, this was the very thing which happened.

The air-ship gradually worked its way upward until it was twenty feet above the surface.

Here it hung suspended until Frank had completed his work on the cogs. This was finished in time.

The four men in the rubber boat were being tossed about on the waves below.

They cheered heartily when Frank appeared on the platform, and shouted:

"All right. Come aboard!"

Then he lowered a long silk ladder until it touched the water. The boat was quickly under it.

The spray wet quartette came hastily clambering aboard.

The boat was drawn up and folded. Then Frank touched

the electric key, the big wings and propellers began to work and up shot the air-ship once more.

There was good reason for mutual congratulations.

"I thought our trip was ended," cried Osman Dyke. "We are indeed in luck!"

"All owing to Mr. Reade's rare presence of mind and action," declared De Frontenac.

"Well, I hope that such a thing will not occur again," said Frank. "Barney, I would not keep tools on that shelf."

"All right, sor," replied the Celt.

Once again to the southward sped the air-ship.

One day Frank came on deck, and said:

"We are upon the Tropic of Cancer now. Within six hours we should sight Cape Catache."

"Cape Catache!" exclaimed De Frontenac, "that is the extreme point of Yucatan."

"Yes!"

"Then we are fully half way to the South American coast!"

"Just about. I shall bear off more to the eastward after leaving the Cape. We will follow the Yucatan Channel into the Gulf of Honduras. From there straight across the Caribbean Sea to the coast of Cartagena, a town at the mouth of the Magdalena River!"

"Thence due south?"

"Yes, passing directly over Bogota, the capital of Colombia. Then we shall be well on our journey."

"I should say so!"

The voyagers kept anxious watch for the first appearance of land, which would be the point of Cape Catache.

Due east was Cape San Antonio, the western point of Cuba.

The body of water between these capes is called the Yucatan Channel.

As Frank had predicted, within six hours land was sighted.

From that height it opened up rapidly on the horizon. As far as the eye could reach to the westward it extended.

Nearer drew the air-ship. Its course was such that a narrow strip of the cape was passed over.

The tropical vegetation was seen as well as the barren, desolate coast so far below. But there was no sign of habitation.

To the southward along the coast extended highlands thickly grown with tropical growth.

The voyagers studied the scene with their glasses with avidity, for it was an agreeable change from the monotony of the sea.

They were disappointed at not seeing human beings. But

now, as they proceeded down the channel, the scene changed somewhat.

Sailing craft became quite common, and were of a type somewhat different from those seen in the Gulf.

"All the natives of this part of the world are mariners," declared Frank Reade, Jr. "They fish, dive for pearls and sponges, and make a living in various ways."

Numerous cays, or small islands, were passed.

Nearly all of these were the rendezvous of fishing, trading, or pirate vessels, for the Caribbean Sea is noted for its pirates.

Frank now bore off a trifle toward Jamaica, and then steered more to the southward.

Night and day the air-ship floated along on her course.

At night the gleam of the electric searchlight lit up the sea and heavens for two miles ahead.

It must have been a strange spectacle to the native mariners to see that strange looking ship with its powerful light so high up there in the sky.

No doubt it excited the superstitious fears of more than one and sent him speeding away as if *le diable* was after him.

No incident worthy of note occurred, however, until one day the voyagers turned out of their bunks to behold a magnificent spectacle.

The air-ship was fast approaching a mighty coast, wonderfully green and beautiful in contour.

Wonderful mountain peaks towered up beyond the horizon, and immense cliffs of basalt were in the foreground, at the base of which the sea spent its fury upon silver sands.

"Colombia at last!" was the cry.

Beautiful South America was spread before them. Barney and Pomp particularly were interested.

"Begorra, it's almost as purty as the ould sod!" declared Barney. "Shure, the green av it luks much the same."

"Golly, I done fink it knock Norf Kyarline all out!" averred Pomp.

Frank had struck the coast at a point east of Cartagena.

He had no desire to visit that city, or, indeed, to tarry in any of the South American towns.

There were good reasons for this, for the people were of a class hardly to be trusted, and they might do the air-ship some damage.

But at the point where they struck the coast there was a little bay and a small hamlet.

"Let us descend here, and see what the place looks like," said Dyke. "I am going to stretch my legs on earth once more."

"Ditto," cried De Frontenac. "With your permission, Frank. Will it not be safe?"

"Why, if you wish," replied the young inventor. "We will make it safe. Lower the ship, Barney."

CHAPTER V.

NEWS OF BURTON.

The Celt was only too willing to obey.

Down settled the air-ship until it hung not a thousand feet over the little hamlet.

The scene below was an amusing one.

The denizens of the place were out in a body, and were rushing about in the most intense excitement.

Some were loading rifles, others were arming themselves with clubs and staves, and a score more were pulling an old rusty cannon down the street.

"Look here!" shouted Dyke in alarm. "I don't know as this is going to be hardly safe, is it?"

"By gracious! It looks to me as if they meant to give us a hot reception," said De Frontenac.

Frank was not a little alarmed.

He studied the scene a moment. Then he drew back with a start.

A rifle-ball just clipped the rail, coming within an ace of his face. It was a close call.

"Hold on, Barney!" shouted Frank; "those people mean business. We must first talk with them."

The air-ship hung suspended about five hundred feet above the town.

Bullets were whistling about the air-ship in showers. Frank stepped into the cabin and rigged up a flag of truce.

With this he stepped to the rail.

It was seen and understood. The firing ceased. The crowd below for a moment became quiet.

Frank saw a tall, powerful built man mount a stone column and make a number of signals.

Frank answered them.

Then the parley began.

Frank addressed the fellow in English, but he replied in Spanish.

Fortunately this tongue was familiar to the young inventor, and he at once answered:

"All right, my friend. Who are you?"

"I am Don Jose de Pasqual, the Alcalde of San Luis!" was the reply. "Who are you?"

"I am an American, and my name is Frank Reade, Jr."

"An American!" replied the alcalde, in alarm. "Then you are a filibuster. You come to do us harm!"

"No," retorted Frank. "I come for nothing of the kind. I am a friend."

But the alcalde remonstrated.

"No, no. *Senor Americano* keep away from San Luis with your floating ship. You are leagued with the devil. *Caramba!* Begone or we will fire!"

"Listen to reason," shouted Frank.

But the alcalde had leaped down to signify that the truce was at an end.

Frank was compelled to draw back. He had scarcely done so when the bullets began to fly again.

"No use," declared the young inventor. "These people are too ignorant to treat with. It would not be safe to land here."

So the proposed landing was at once abandoned.

The air-ship soared aloft and out of range.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., set the course due south for the northern limit of the Andes.

These were encountered a day later.

Then a course was held for the Ecuador line. A strange and wild country it was which was passed over.

There were many cities and towns, all densely populated. Fertile valleys abounded in which long-horned cattle grazed.

In the mountains the scene was of the wildest and grandest.

Many wonderful sights were witnessed; many scenes passed over, but the Era did not descend.

"Wait until you get down in Peru!" declared De Frontenac, confidently; "there you will see scenery which will put this to shame."

But before many days our adventurers thought that the scenery of Ecuador would do.

"Upon my word!" gasped Dyke, in sheer amazement. "What awful mountain is that? Why, we are far below its summit!"

"That is Cotopaxi," declared De Frontenac. "Over eighteen thousand feet high. But old Chimborazo, twenty-one thousand four hundred and twenty-four feet high, is the wonder of Ecuador."

All these were wonderful sights to the voyagers in the air-ship.

These mighty mountain peaks were passed around, not even, for the rarefied air at that awful height was painful to the lungs.

De Frontenac was, perhaps, the one most familiar with all these wonders.

"They are not new to me," he said. "Almost every part of these wonderful mountains, ever visited by man, are quite familiar to me."

"I presume you have thoroughly explored them?" said Frank.

"Ah, no, indeed. There are parts of them which have never been explored by man, and have hitherto been deemed inaccessible."

"And yet," said Dyke, "we are the favored ones to be able to gain that end."

"Would you have thought it easy to track your man Burton in those inaccessible wilds?" asked De Frontenac.

"I should have realized very speedily how utterly impossible it would be to explore this region, to say nothing of finding my man."

"Exactly."

"But——"

"What?"

"On the other hand it would seem to me quite difficult for a man to find a congenial quarter here in which to hide away from justice all his life."

"There are scores of such places," declared De Frontenac. "People inhabit these wilds whose existence is never dreamed of by the passing travelers. There are tribes of natives who have never seen a white man, inaccessible valleys and gulches where the explorer has never penetrated. Moreover, many of these mountaineers, particularly the Peruvians, have comfortable homes among the fastnesses and there they pass their lives. It would not be difficult for a fugitive from justice to find refuge with them."

"Doubtless that is what Burton has done," said Dyke.

"No doubt. I should, however, consider it a herculean task to find him, and very much like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Indeed, yes," replied the detective, slowly, but apparently not yielding hope; "however, I shall try."

"Perhaps fortune may favor you."

"I pray that it may."

The air-ship had for some time kept far above the country spread below.

As there was a general desire to get a better look at the region, Frank now allowed the Era to descend.

They hung over a mighty gorge thousands of feet in descent. This was spanned by a curious rope bridge.

A path led in winding form along the verge of awful precipices. Over this path nearly naked natives toiled with great bundles upon their heads and backs, bound on by straps.

They walked with ease and surety, where the slightest misstep would have meant sure death.

Quite a number of these mountain carriers were then climbing the peaks when the air-ship appeared above them.

The effect was peculiar.

Astounded by such a strange and inexplicable spectacle, all of the natives passed in superstitious terror.

The hideous vultures, peculiar to the Andes, soared around the air-ship, but were not lighter on the wing than it.

What the natives took the air-ship for it would be hard to say. One thing was certain, they were terrified.

And yet they could not retreat in haste. To descend the narrow path rapidly was dangerous indeed.

So they cowered upon the narrow path, muttering superstitious prayers. Frank allowed the Era to settle in the gorge, and then appeared on deck.

He addressed the mountain carriers in Spanish.

This was the necessary open sesame.

They responded at once.

"For the love of our Holy Mother, senor!" cried one of the Indians, "how can you float in the air that way? Does Satan support you?"

"Not a bit," replied Frank. "This is an air-ship."

"Jesu pity! We have never seen one before."

"Well, you see it now. I am Frank Reade, Jr., an American. Do you know of a white man sojourning in this part of the world?"

There was a moment's consultation, and then one of them replied:

"Si, senor; we know him well. He has gone into the Isabella diamond mine."

"Ah," cried Frank, eagerly. "Can you tell me what his name is?"

"Si, senor," cried one of the carriers. "He was Senor Burton, a rich American. Ah, but he scattered silver in the streets of Bonita!"

"He is wild and reckless," cried another. "He will risk his life to find the Light of the Mountains, which is said to be the largest diamond in the world. Your Americans are brave and skillful."

Dyke, the detective, gripped the rail of the air-ship and gasped:

"Great heavens, Frank! I am on the right track at last! What a stroke of luck!"

"You are indeed lucky to get news of Burton so quickly."

"But in what direction has he gone? How shall we find him?"

"I will learn at once."

Frank leaned over the rail and questioned the carriers again.

"Where do you carry your packs?" he asked

"To Bonita," was the reply. "It is a city in the hills. We came from Iquique, which is by the sea."

"When do you expect to reach Bonita?"

"Before another evening, senor."

"And then——"

"We will reload our packs and return to Iquique."

"Very good," said Frank. "Now you can tell me where I can find the American, Burton."

There was a moment of silence.

Then one replied:

"We can do that, senor. He is in the Isabella mine."

"Ah, but where is that?"

One of the carriers arose and pointed to the southward.

"A hundred leagues thither!" he exclaimed. "The mountain is one of stone. You will know it when you see it. There is the Isabella mine. It will be easy to find Burton there."

A few more questions in regard to Burton and the diamond mine, and Frank turned, saying:

"I am going to the Isabella mine at once! Dyke, you may be quite sure of caging your man!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT ISABELLA.

Osman Dyke, detective, was delighted with Frank's proposition.

"Good!" he cried. "That is the sort of talk I like. I hope we shall win success, as you say."

"If he is in the mine you may be sure of it."

Over the mighty gorges and peaks sailed the air-ship.

To attempt to describe the wonderful scenery which was witnessed would be quite impossible.

So, with the reader's permission, we will pass it over and continue with thrilling incidents which were close at hand.

After some hours of random sailing over the wild region Barney cried:

"Bejabers, Mither Frank, I think I can see the Isabella mountain!"

At once all were interested.

"Where, Barney?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"Shure, sor, jist atween thim two tall peaks."

Everybody looked in the direction indicated, and not one in the party but gave an exclamation.

Sure enough there was the mountain of stone as described by the Andean natives.

At once the air-ship was headed for it. Soon it towered before them, almost a perfect cone of solid rock.

At the base of this mountain there was a level plain with much green verdure.

Here there was a pleasant little town surrounded by vineyards and gardens replete with rich fruits.

They knew that this was Isabella, the beautiful little town at the entrance of the diamond mines.

Here the tributary to the Amazon ran leaping and foaming over hundreds of miles of rapids and cataracts to the mighty selvas below.

Upon the west was the great Peruvian seaboard, and from Callao and Lima merchants sent great pack trains over these mighty heights to barter for gold and diamonds and rich wines.

The Isabella diamond diggings were an alluvial tract of country just half-way up the slopes of the great mountain.

Here there were table lands and basins covering thousands of acres, and in the red earth the precious gems were found.

That Burton should have sought this region was quite natural.

Back of it was a region full of hiding places, and inhabited by an extremely treacherous type of Indians.

Among the Chilka people the fugitive would be certain to find a covert safe enough from ordinary pursuit.

Indeed Burton had made friends with the chief of the Chilkas, and it would therefore be an easy matter for him to set all pursuit at naught.

Before the air-ship descended into the Isabella valley a consultation was held.

"There is a question," said Frank, "whether it is wiser to go openly down into the town with the air-ship or not."

"Why not?" asked De Frontenac.

"For the reason that Burton, seeing us coming, would get the alarm and skip out," said Dyke.

"That is true," agreed Frank. "It is quite impossible to approach the town in the Era without being seen."

For a moment all were thoughtful.

"Don't you suppose they have seen us already?" asked De Frontenac.

"Begorra, I don't see how they cud iver help it!" cried Barney. "Shure, we've been in soight at the town fer a long while."

"Which is very true," agreed Dyke. "I don't know as we would gain anything, Frank, by any other course than by going boldly down into the place."

"Perhaps so."

"If there is any law in the place I think I can get the authorities on my side."

"There ought to be plenty of law!" declared Frank.

"Peru is an independent nation and on the best of terms with the United States."

"Oh, I have provided for that," said Dyke. "Before I left home I secured through the foreign consuls extradition papers in all of the South American States."

"Then you are all right," cried Frank. "Of course Isabella is a sufficiently important place to have an alcalde and a tribunal."

"I should think so."

"Of course it is."

"Then our best move is to descend and attempt to enlist the officers of the law in our behalf."

"Exactly."

"All right. I am agreeable."

So Barney allowed the air-ship to float down into the valley.

They were now a thousand feet over the wonderful vineyards and the town, and a startling scene was revealed.

The appearance of the air-ship in the sky above their heads was no doubt a bit of a surprise to the Peruvians.

They had never seen anything of the sort, and in many cases superstitious fear prevailed.

Great trains of heavily burdened llamas were trailing into the town. In many cases the native drivers fled incontinently at the sight of the mysterious wonder.

In other cases merchants and vineyard keepers stood staring at the ship in stupid wonder.

The native soldiers of the little fort recognized the apparition as a certain scheme of their foes and Chilian neighbors to destroy the country, and at once beat to arms.

Great excitement reigned generally in the little hamlet.

Those on board the air-ship viewed the scene with deep interest.

It was a serious question in the minds of all as to whether they were to be received in a friendly fashion or not.

The incident with the Colombian alcalde was fresh in their minds. Much depended upon their reception in Isabella.

Suddenly, as the air-ship was hovering over the town, a startling thing happened.

It came near proving a catastrophe also.

Some of the defenders of the little fort had elevated the muzzle of a cannon to the right degree and sent a ball hurtling upward.

It narrowly missed striking the hull of the air-ship.

"Whew!" exclaimed De Frontenac, in consternation: "that was a close call!"

"Right!" cried Dyke. "They evidently mean business. Eh, Frank?"

"You are right," agreed the young inventor. "We are to be treated as a foe."

"Is there no way we can make friends with them?" asked Dyke, anxiously.

"We will try," replied Frank.

With which he took a white flag and stepped to the rail. The effect was instantly seen.

The men at the cannon abstained from firing, and a white flag was seen below in response.

"They have accepted the truce," declared De Frontenac.

"Good!" cried Dyke.

A man appeared on the wall of the Andean fort with a white flag. Frank called to Barney:

"Let the air-ship go down to within speaking distance."

"All roight, sor."

Down sank the Era.

When not more than two hundred feet above the fort it hung in suspension. Every detail of the fortification could be seen.

The upturned Spanish faces were regarding the air-ship wonderingly. Frank wasted no time.

He leaned over the rail and said in Spanish:

"Beunos, Senor Commandante. My compliments to you!"

"Per Christo!" came back the reply. "Who in the fiend's name are you, coming down from the sky?"

"We are Americans."

"Americans!" exclaimed the Peruvian spokesman. "Ah, I should have known that, for nobody else could do the wonderful things you do."

"Which is a compliment to my country such as a true-born Peruvian alone can make," replied Frank, diplomatically.

"Good!" whispered Dyke. "Give them taffy, Frank."

The reply evidently pleased the Spanish commander, for he said:

"We are friends with your people. If you mean us no harm, you are welcome to Isabella."

"We come to make a bond of friendship with you!" replied Frank. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Frank Reade, Jr., the owner of this air-ship. These are my friends, and Americans, also."

"I return the compliment, Senor Americano. I am Joaquin Murillo, the governor of the Province of Isabella."

"I am honored, most noble governor."

"The honor is mine, most gifted senor," replied the governor, urbanely. "Will you not descend and try of the vintage of Isabella?"

"A thousand thanks!"

Frank turned to Barney.

"Let the air-ship down," he said. "She may rest in the yard of the fort."

Barney obeyed orders.

The Era descended into the fort yard. Frank stepped down from the platform and saluted Joaquin Murillo.

A few moments' conversation made them fast friends.

Other Spanish or Peruvian notables came forward and were introduced. Frank brought his companions forward, also.

Then wine was imbibed, and Frank next invited the governor and his friends to go aboard the air-ship.

They were delighted and wonderstruck with its fine appointments. After all this was over, Murillo said:

"Pardon, Senor Reade, but will it be an impertinence to ask what has brought you to Isabella?"

"By no means," replied the young inventor. "It is a matter of very serious moment, I assure you."

"Indeed!"

"We are here with extradition papers for the proper arrest of a fellow-countryman guilty of murder."

"What! A murderer!" exclaimed Murillo. "An American here in Isabella?"

"That is what we believe, your excellency."

"Pray let me see your papers."

Frank motioned to Dyke.

The detective came forward.

He produced his papers at once, and the Spanish governor glanced over them.

"These are true," he said. "They bear the correct seal of our court. We cannot deny the right."

"Do you know of this man, Burton?" asked Frank.

The governor drew a deep breath.

"Indeed, I know him well," he said. "He has been in our midst some while. But I never dreamed him a murderer. However, you shall have the aid of our law to capture him."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTURE OF BURTON.

The delight of Osman Dyke, the detective, can hardly be expressed in words.

"Good!" he cried. "I shall succeed in bringing John Burton to justice."

"Then Burton is at present in Isabella?" asked Frank in Spanish.

"Yes," replied the governor. "Or at least he goes every day to the diamond field, where he owns a claim."

"If you wish I will take some officers and go thither with you now."

"That will be a great favor to us."

"How shall we catch him?"

The governor gave a few sharp orders to an aid.

In a few moments four uniformed men appeared.

They were Peruvian police and were ready for duty.

The start was made at once.

The governor and the four officers got aboard the air-ship. Frank motioned to Barney.

The Celt pressed the key, and the air-ship shot upward. The people below cheered wildly.

It was a new and wonderful sight to them, as well as a novel experience to the new passengers.

At first they all turned pale and were not a little alarmed at leaving the earth so rapidly.

But Frank quieted their fears by saying repeatedly in Spanish:

"Have no fear, gentlemen. If harm comes to you it befalls us also."

The air-ship struck out direct for the Isabella mines.

Soon the immense diamond fields came into view.

A strange sight it was.

There were mighty excavations, immense heaps of thoroughly sifted soil, and everywhere throngs of natives were working in the boiling sun.

Here some of the most valuable of stones were recovered.

As the air-ship sailed on the governor, who was at the rail, pointed to an adobe building at the base of a rocky cliff.

"There is the claim of Burton, the American," he said. "You will find him there, I think."

A number of natives were digging near the hut. By them was a tall man in white duck and a Panama hat.

The appearance of the air-ship over the plain had of course attracted much attention.

Astonished, the diamond diggers quit work and craned their necks to look at the wonder.

At this the Spanish governor smiled.

"I was like them," he said. "Truly, I do not wonder."

But the moment Burton looked up, he gave a tremendous backward leap.

His unmasked face, clearly revealed in the sunlight, seemed to turn ashen with horror and fear.

"That is him!" cried Dyke. "That is my man! Don't let him escape!"

The air-ship was bearing down to the spot like a mighty vulture.

Frank leaned over the rail and shouted:

"John Burton, we want you. Stand where you are, or be shot!"

The murderer made no reply, nor did he heed the warning.

Swift as a flash he sprang into a copse and then was seen running along a path which led around the mountain.

"Stop him!" screamed Dyke. "Don't let him escape!"

Frank raised his pistol.

"Shall I stop him?" he asked.

"No, no! Don't shoot him!" cried Dyke. "He must be captured alive."

Frank then cried to Barney:

"Follow him close around the mountain, Barney."

"All roight, sor."

Around the mountain wall the path ran, and here was an awful gorge more than a thousand feet deep.

Its walls were a sheer descent, and below was a torrent.

Along this path the fugitive was running. Into the gorge the air-ship at once sailed.

Here it seemed was a chance both for the fugitive and for the pursuers.

If Burton could reach a cavern far above, he might seek a hiding place in it.

On the other hand, the air-ship could be sailed up to the wall, and he could be headed off on the path. For a time it was hard to tell which plan would succeed.

But as it happened neither did.

Suddenly, and without warning, Burton slipped over the edge of the path. Down he went into space.

"That is the end of him!" cried all in chorus.

They rushed to the rail to see his body dashed to pulp so far below. But this did not happen.

Down the sheer wall he slid like a rocket. But not two hundred feet below was a jutting shelf.

Here, from a crevice, several mountain pines grew, and projected far out over the chasm.

Into the branches of these the fugitive slid with great force.

For a moment it seemed as if he must go down through them.

But he did not.

To everybody's surprise he clung there. He was saved from an awful death.

But it was only rescue from one fate to meet another. He was now at the mercy of his pursuers.

"Now we have him!" yelled Dyke. "Luck is ours! The game is bagged at last!"

So indeed it seemed.

The air-ship sailed down to a level with the shelf of rock. There in the branches crouched the desperate-looking man. His face was copper-colored and his eyes bloodshot.

Foam was upon his lips, and in one hand he clutched a revolver. But Frank Reade, Jr., had covered him.

"None of that!" he cried, sternly; "drop that weapon or it will be the worse for you!"

Burton muttered a savage oath.

"Curse you!" he gritted. "You want my life!"

"Not without a fair trial, John Burton," cried Dyke; "it is better for you to surrender and meet it."

"You will hang me!"

"Not unless you deserve it."

"You have no proof that I killed my brother," sneered the villain.

"Then you have less to fear. Better take your chances in a United States court. Come aboard and give yourself up."

There was a snaky gleam in the villain's eyes.

The hand which held the revolver twitched nervously for a moment, as if he longed to use it.

Then he flung it from him.

"I yield!" he cried, "on the condition of fair play."

"You shall have it," declared Dyke.

"Who are you?"

"I am a United States detective."

"From New York?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll surrender to you. I'm not guilty, and have nothing to fear."

Dyke smiled contemptuously.

He read the villain's soul through and through. He saw the cunning purpose lurking in his evil eyes.

"Once he is in the Tombs," he muttered, "he'll never come out till he sits in the electric chair."

The bow of the air-ship was now run close to the ledge of rock. A rope ladder was thrown out.

Burton came across it quickly.

The moment he stepped on deck the detective slipped manacles upon his wrists.

The villain growled.

"What's this for?" he demanded. "Are you afraid of me? That's not fair play! There are six of you to one!"

"All right," said Dyke, coolly. "We'll let you wear them a little while. Now, Frank, where will we put him?"

"In stateroom No. 5," replied the young inventor. "He will be safe there, for the door is of steel and the windows heavily guarded."

Accordingly Burton, despite his protests, was locked in stateroom No. 5.

When Dyke came on deck, Frank had turned the prow of the air-ship back toward Isabella.

Governor Murillo had been more than delighted with the trip.

"It is a wonderful experience," he said. "Only to think that you Americans have at last solved the problem of flying in the air!"

"But we have not forgotten that it was a Spaniard who discovered our wonderful country," said Frank.

This pleased the Peruvian governor immensely, and he demonstrated it with a smile.

When Isabella was reached again, the place was up in arms to welcome the air-ship.

A band was playing, and a salute was fired from the fort.

Darkness was coming on, and it was proposed that they spend the night in the town.

So the air-ship was landed near the fort upon a broad patch of green.

Murillo detailed a guard of soldiers to guard against harm being done the air-ship.

Then, as darkness came down, Frank turned on the electric lights and dazzled the Andean people.

The searchlight made the green as light as day. A little evening fete had been arranged.

The governor caused a string band to play, and a bevy of pretty Spanish girls went through a mazy dance upon the green.

It was a picturesque and beautiful sight, and the aerial travelers gazed upon it spell-bound.

Until long past midnight this sort of thing continued.

Then finally all retired to await the coming of day. During all this Burton, the murderer, was sullen and silent in his stateroom.

Barney and Pomp took turns as sentry, though Murillo had furnished a military guard.

Nothing worthy of record occurred during the dark hours of the morning. But when the Andean sun peeped over the high peaks, all were quickly astir.

"Now," said Frank to Detective Dyke, "what shall we do? I can take you over to Callao and you can get a steamer home. Or you can remain aboard the air-ship."

"Why not do the latter?" replied the detective.

"Certainly; unless you are in haste to have your man tried."

"Where are you going from here?"

"With De Frontenac to explore an inaccessible valley inhabited by an unknown race."

The detective was interested.

"With your permission," he said, "I will stay with you. I can afford to wait, for you would beat any steamer back to New York."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VALLEY ABOVE THE CLOUDS.

"Don't be too sure of that!" said Frank. "We may be delayed a long while in the unexplored Andes."

"I don't care! I am sure of my man, and he cannot escape!"

"Very true! So let it be!"

Governor Murillo made overtures to Frank to remain longer at Isabella.

But Frank replied:

"I have another project on hand which will take much of my time and energy during the rest of my stay in South America."

And he shook hands with the Spanish governor, and the Era sailed away over the mountains amid the plaudits of the Isabellä people.

Frank now gave his whole attention to the problem of finding the mysterious valley above the clouds described by De Frontenac.

The French-Irish explorer recognized many localities as they sailed on as places he had visited.

Once he said:

"It is here that I first learned of the Cordilleras Los Angeles, or the Mountain of the Angels, as the natives call it. They imagine that the people who live up there are a race superior to man and endowed with supernatural traits."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Then we cannot be far from the Cordilleras?"

"Yonder it is."

De Frontenac pointed to the southward.

There against the horizon was a long, ragged array of peaks with a serrated effect.

They extended in what seemed a long oval far to the southward.

At once all began to study the distant peaks with their glasses.

It could be seen that there was doubtless an inclosure or valley within these mountain walls.

That a race of native Incas might there yet find a secluded home was not altogether improbable.

"It will be interesting to visit that unknown and hith-

erto unseen nation above the clouds," cried Frank. "Set a straight course for the Cordilleras, Barney."

The cool, refreshing breezes of the morning were blowing up from the depths below.

The voyagers were all in the best of spirits.

The only human being on board at all out of sorts was the prisoner, Burton, in stateroom No. 5.

Thus far the murderer had given no trouble.

He had been extremely taciturn, even sullen, yet he ate his meals heartily, and seemed to be in good spirits bodily.

The Era now swiftly bore down for the Los Angeles valley. As it drew nearer the peaks Frank sought an opening between them.

Through this the ship sailed.

A wonderful scene was spread to the view of the voyagers.

At last they really gazed upon the nation above the clouds. The scene was a marvelous one.

An immense flat plain, covering hundreds of square miles, was inclosed by the precipitous mountain walls and inaccessible peaks.

As green and bright as could be imagined was the verdure of this lovely valley.

And there, down in its midst, and by a sparkling lake, was a city of marvelous beauty.

Its walls and towers and domes were of whitest stone and glistened in the sun amid groves of trees like a scene in fairyland.

Upon the plain were productive farms, which men, strangely clad, were working. The llama seemed the beast of burden.

The city of the elevated nation was thronged with people. At that distance their personal appearance could not be judged.

But it looked like a high grade of civilization.

The voyagers gazed spellbound.

"Upon my word!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., excitedly, "this is a discovery of benefit to science! Did ever anybody dream of such a thing?"

"Wonderful!" cried Detective Dyle. "And to think that we are the first privileged in many centuries to visit them and perhaps talk with them!"

"That is indeed a wonderful thing to contemplate," declared De Frontenac. "I only hope they will receive us in a friendly way."

"I have no doubt they will," said Frank. "They are evidently a pastoral people."

"Yes; for they never have had anybody to make war with."

"That is true!"

The air-ship sailed over a vast tract of land where natives were at work gathering what looked like maize.

At that height they were seen to be of a similar type to the average South American native or Indian.

But they were dressed in a more comely fashion with blankets made of gayly colored material.

As the air-ship appeared above them it made a sensation.

The working natives in some instances flung themselves upon their faces in superstitious terror.

In others they fled incontinently, as if pursued by a demon.

This made the voyagers laugh, for it indeed looked comical. Into their adobe houses the natives fled.

"They no doubt think we are some strange supernatural visitation," said Frank. "I don't much blame them for being terrified."

"Begorra, it's ther naygur they saw hanging over the rail!" cried Barney, willing to make a shot at Pomp.

"Golly, dey jes' needn' take no mo' dan one look at yo', chile," cried Pomp in retaliation. "Dat mug ob yours done scare de wits out ob anyfing!"

Everybody laughed, and the air-ship now boomed on toward the city.

Everywhere the natives fled in terror before the advance of the Era.

But Frank kept on, the air-ship sailing a couple of hundred feet above the plains. Now elegant paved roads were reached.

These led into the city.

This was a marvel in its way.

The style of architecture was something indeed unique. The buildings were not of great height, but much of the stone was delicately sculptured.

That the strange people were lovers of art was evident, for every portico, and even roof, were adorned with not altogether crude statuary.

The streets of the city were broad, and neatly paved.

There were no vehicles of any kind, that is, none with wheels, consequently sidewalks were not needed.

Palanquins, carried by gigantic men, were quite common.

There were shops and bazaars, temples and public edifices the same as in eastern cities.

And in the huge central square of the city was a mammoth basin and aqueduct which brought the purest water from the mountains.

The windows, house-tops and balconies all held people, men, women and children.

The streets were densely thronged.

A particularly large crowd were gathered in a square

where there was an immense idol. Before this there was a mighty altar, and here a fire was burning.

At once De Frontenac cried:

"Ah! like the old Incas, they are idolaters and given to human sacrifice. Look!"

"Horrors!" exclaimed Dyke. "They are cutting that poor wretch to pieces!"

Instinctively every one was obliged to turn their eyes away from what was really a horrible sight.

The high priests, four in number, were deliberately hacking a poor victim to pieces with their sharp cleavers, and throwing the pieces into the eternal fire as it was probably designated.

Off came an arm and then the head. When entirely dismembered, the trunk was also thrown in.

It was a horrible spectacle, and sickened the voyagers.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Dyke. "If that is the sort of people they are, I don't want anything to do with them!"

"It is terrible!"

"But see!"

"We have created a sensation."

This was true. The people had now caught sight of the strange air-monster hovering over them.

The result was thrilling.

In an instant all was in a turmoil. There came up from the streets an awful din.

The priests rushed hither and thither, shouting incantations. The people were in a panic.

"What will they do?" cried Frank. "Have they no king or recognized ruler?"

"Hold on!" cried De Frontenac. "Here he comes!"

Out of a massive and richly sculptured building came a richly draped open palanquin.

It was in fact really a kind of portable throne, carried by twenty stout men, five at each bar.

Upon this throne sat a man dressed in what seemed to be a cloth of gold. Barbaric splendor attended him.

Precious stones fairly studded his garments. The throne was golden, and all the attendants were dressed in the same cloth of gold.

It was afterward learned that this cloth was indeed far superior to the cloth of gold known in the civilized world.

Its texture was really partly of spun gold. The weaving, however, was a secret of the natives, which it was death to part with.

"Upon my word!" cried Dyke. "His Royal Highness is a fine-looking man."

This was true.

The king was a powerful built man, with aquiline features and pure white beard and hair.

This gave him a patrician appearance, and was very grand indeed.

The king and all his retainers gazed at the air-ship in amazement. Many of the people fell upon their faces.

But the old king appeared to be undaunted.

He sprang up, swinging his mace defiantly, and hurled anathemas at the strange visitor.

Evidently they regarded the air-ship as a foe, perhaps a minion of the evil spirit, and they hoped to drive it away.

One of the high priests even began shooting sacred arrows with a sacred bow at the Era.

But these, of course, could do no harm.

One of them, however, was captured by De Frontenac.

The tip or head was of solid gold.

"Well," cried the explorer, "they can shoot these arrows at us a month if they wish; they will be very welcome."

"How are we going to make friends with them?" asked Dyke.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIDDEN RACE.

Indeed this was a question well worth considering.

It was necessary to make friends with the strange people. That, it did not seem, would be easy to do.

They were influenced, no doubt, by an intense superstitious fear.

This must first be overruled. Frank leaned over the rail and tried to make pacific gestures.

For a time this was of no avail.

The natives made all manner of fierce gestures. Then the king evidently saw that this was not going to frighten the air-ship away.

Also it had given him time to collect his senses a bit.

He saw that the air-ship was a terrible object, and no doubt concluded very wisely to first investigate its character.

So he suddenly changed his tactics.

His orders went forth that there be silence. As this command was seen to travel through the crowd silence instantly became the order.

Then the king rose in his palanquin.

He had caught sight of Frank leaning over the rail. It did not require a second glance for him to see that it was a man of flesh and blood like himself.

There was a faint look of astonishment on the king's face which amazed Frank not a little.

The young inventor could not understand a word he uttered, but he replied with many smirks and smiles.

"We are your friends. Yes! Why don't you receive us socially?"

Of course the native ruler did not understand Frank, but he seemed to comprehend that he was of a different race of people come to pay him a visit.

This changed the complexion of everything.

The native king was all right now. He addressed the people in apparently explanative terms and returned Frank's smirks and smiles with interest.

A space was cleared in the crowd, and the native king made motions for the air-ship to descend.

Frank hesitated.

"I don't know whether to trust these heathens or not," he said.

"I think it will do if we arm ourselves!" declared De Frontenac.

"Very well."

Accordingly rifles were brought out of the cabin, and all was made ready for the repelling of an assault.

Then Frank allowed the air-ship slowly to descend. It rested upon ground where space had been cleared.

The throng kept a respectable distance, evidently by the king's orders, for which Frank was very grateful.

Frank stepped forward and greeted the native ruler. Of course it was very difficult to exchange any comprehensive words.

But Frank speedily found that the other was quick-witted and would easily embrace any sign talk.

After some persistent work this attempt at crude intercourse became quite successful.

Frank managed to convey the fact that they belonged to a people far to the north, and that they were simply exploring the mountains for a pastime.

This seemed to please the native king, who had evidently feared that they had come for conquest.

He conveyed the information that his people were not warlike, and shunned open battle.

For this reason, hundreds of years previous, his ancestors had sought this secluded valley.

An earthquake had blocked the exit and also made it inaccessible, but none of the tribe ever ventured to leave the valley.

Thus they had dwelt for centuries in this corner.

A nation above the clouds they had been, survivors of all the world's great deluges outside.

It was a strange story, and Frank followed it with interest. He speedily found that the Hachyones, which was

their tribe name, were an exceedingly docile and peaceable people.

Now that their superstitious fears had vanished, they made great manifestations of friendliness.

This was most agreeable, and Frank lost no opportunity to cultivate the feeling.

De Frontenac had already entered into sign talk with a number of them. They were exceedingly bright.

But the air-ship was a source of much wonderment.

Frank tried to explain the mechanism of the air-ship to King Orullo, which was the monarch's name.

But it was impossible for him to understand the theory and application of electricity.

He nodded his head in a good-natured way, and Frank abandoned the attempt.

King Orullo proved himself an hospitable monarch, for the carcase of a mountain deer was brought and roasted upon the spot.

Also some peculiar wine, which was possessed of a musty flavor, was furnished.

Our adventurers partook of the repast, so as not to offend the native monarch.

After this the voyagers were the best of friends with the Hualpamas.

They had nothing to fear from these simple children of the wilderness. They were honest and peaceable.

So De Frontenac was able to conduct his researches most successfully.

One thing was most remarkable.

The ancient Incas had been noted for the amount of pure gold they mined and used.

But almost the only metal known to the Hualpamas was gold.

It furnished material for nearly all their tools and weapons.

Indeed, many of the idols in their temples were of pure gold.

Various dishes, and even the commonest of domestic ware, was of the precious metal.

To them steel was much more precious.

Our adventurers acquired great quantities of gold by simple exchange.

De Frontenac learned that the valley was rich in gold and diamonds.

Indeed, the king gave Frank a jacket fairly studded with beautiful and rare diamonds.

In return the young inventor gave him steel knives and a sword.

This delighted Orullo.

A more hospitable people than the Hualpamas could not be imagined. Anything and everything was at the disposal of their wonderful visitors.

King Orullo was never tired of making sign talk with Frank.

He listened for hours to conversation made by the young inventor upon wonderful far-away America.

The king made signs that he would like to have more of Frank's countrymen visit him.

Frank replied that he ought to visit America, but he shook his head violently, replying:

"It is against the will of our sacred gods that any of us should leave this valley ever."

"Then the world will have to take our word for these strange people," thought Frank, "for no ordinary method of travel will enable anybody to reach them."

Several days were spent in the city of the Hualpamas.

Then one day Frank said to De Frontenac:

"Well, have you had enough?"

"Yes," replied the explorer. "I am satisfied; let us go."

"We have visited the most wonderful people in the world!"

"Very true. It will be many years, perhaps, before they are visited by white men again."

King Orullo was much disturbed when he heard that his interesting visitors were about to leave him.

He held out many inducements, but Frank was resolute.

"We must go," he said. "There are other parts of the Andes to explore. Then we must get Burton home."

Thus far the murderer had seemed to accept his imprisonment philosophically.

He seemed to have no plan of escape. Indeed, if he had, it would not be easy to execute it with the manacles on his wrists.

Frank conferred with Dyke, and it was decided to remove them.

The prisoner had seemed docile enough, and it seemed harsh indeed to take such extreme measures.

"At any rate," said Frank, "he cannot get away from us, for the stateroom is strongly fortified."

Burton made no comment when the manacles were removed, but his eyes gleamed dangerously.

The air-ship left the city of Hualpamas finally, and a northward course was taken.

Frank had heard of a volcanic lake at the summit of a high mountain near, and was anxious to visit it.

So the airship's course was set for the volcano of Tachicoma. Before the next nightfall it was in sight.

De Frontenac stood by the rail, and all were studying the country, as he said:

"Down there is the great mountain trail from Central Brazil to the western coast."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Dyke, in surprise. "I don't see anything but a footpath."

"Perhaps not; but thousands of heavily burdened men and beasts go over that route every year."

"An immense carrying trade."

"I should say so. They carry minerals, dye-stuffs, certain kinds of fruits, and bring back cloth and knick-knacks from Yankeedom, which are bartered with the natives for their products."

"And everything must be carried by pack train?"

"Certainly."

"Will they never have railroads?"

"Not through these inaccessible mountain fastnesses," declared De Frontenac. "They could never climb the grades."

"I presume not. But what an immense forest down there! See the beautiful plumaged birds. See—there is a tiger!"

"A jaguar. Yes, in these woods you will find the chattering monkeys, screeching parrots, little wood deer, and—the deadly python."

"The python!" exclaimed the detective. "Ah, I would like to see one."

"You may have a chance if Frank makes a landing anywhere in the lowland wilds."

A sudden cry came from forward.

Pomp had been on guard there, and his startled words came aft with thrilling force.

"Golly, Marse Frank, come quick! Dere am de debbil to pay jes' below us!"

CHAPTER X.

BURTON'S ESCAPE.

Of course such an exclamation could not help creating general excitement and interest.

Everybody rushed to the rail and looked over.

And there down below in the mountain path was a thrilling scene.

A pack of llamas, with native attendants, had been climbing the mountain side. In the party were three Europeans.

At least such their dress betokened them. English tourists evidently, two men and one woman.

Part of the way up the mountain, the path led under copiously leaved beech trees.

Passing under one of these the lady had received an awful shock, when a huge python slid its folds down and about her and her donkey.

Scream after scream pealed from her lips.

The great rearing head and jaws of the python were above her. They seemed certain to strike her.

Her two escorts seemed to have become stupefied and unable to act. The native mountaineers were too far in the rear to give immediate help.

As luck had it, Frank had been aft with a rifle striving to get a shot at a huge condor.

The moment he heard the woman's screams he leaned over the rail and took in the situation.

"A horrible python!" yelled Dyke. "My God! he will strike her!"

One blow of those awful jaws would have struck the fainting woman dead.

But quick as a flash, and wholly on the impulse of the moment, Frank flung his rifle to his shoulder, took aim, and fired..

Crack!

The aim had been swift, true and deadly.

The rifle ball flattened the snake's head like a pancake.

The reptile relaxed its folds and rolled back upon the ground, a wriggling, dying mass.

Then those below ran to catch the fainting woman and looked up with amazement to see the air-ship above them.

Frank shouted to Barney:

"Lower the ship!"

Down settled the Era rapidly.

Dyke and De Frontenac were now by Frank's side, much excited.

"Upon my word, Frank, you deserve commendation. You made a wonderful shot."

"That is so," cried Dyke. "It was just in the nick of time!"

"Thank Heaven I was able to save her!" cried Frank.

Down settled the air-ship and touched the ground.

The rescued woman had recovered, and one of her escorts came forward to the rail of the Era.

"We owe you more than we can ever repay for that timely shot!" he cried. "It was a magnificent bit of marksmanship."

"That is all right," said Frank. "Is the lady recovered?"

"Oh, yes, thank you."

The speaker was a short, thick-set Englishman, with a genial cast of features.

He introduced himself.

"I am Lord Harry Cheswick, of Cornwall, England," he declared. "May I ask whom I have the honor of meeting?"

"Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown, U. S. A." replied Frank.

"An American!" cried Lord Cheswick. "Well, I might have known that nobody but an American would solve the problem of aerial navigation. Your air-ship is a perfect wonder."

"I am satisfied with it," replied Frank.

"You are traveling over this region for pleasure?"

"And exploration."

"Good! We, my partner, Earl Warlock and Lady Warlock, his wife, with myself, are doing South America. We hope to reach Callao some time, from which place we shall go to Chili."

"That is pleasant," agreed Frank. "Can I be of further assistance to you?"

"I think not, sir. But pardon, please. Give the lady the chance she desires to thank you in person."

Lady Warlock, a beautiful and intellectual woman, now came forward on her husband's arm. She greeted Frank warmly and thanked him earnestly.

"It is nothing," replied the young inventor, with a happy smile. "I am always honored to serve."

"I shall never forget you, Mr. Reade," replied the English lady, warmly.

After some further pleasant talk the episode ended.

The air-ship went on its way, and the pack train likewise.

The python had been examined, and found to measure forty-five feet in length.

"That's the biggest snake I ever saw," declared Dyle. "I don't think I fancy this country."

"Or rather the snakes," laughed De Frontenac.

"Yes."

Tambobambo mountain was now rapidly approached.

It was in appearance very much like Cotopaxi. The same funnel-like column of smoke arose from it.

The air-ship floated up the sides until the great crater was reached, and here was revealed the volcanic lake.

Here, right in the top of the mighty mountain, was a hissing, boiling lake of water.

It occupied the whole of what had been a vortex of burning lava.

But the smoke of the once active volcano had been

changed to steam. Water in gushing torrents took the place of lava.

At times mighty geysers shot up to a height of fully a hundred feet. Surely this was very odd.

Frank at once figured out the cause to the satisfaction of his listeners.

"Under the mountain," he declared, "there were great springs of water. These doubtless found a vent through the crater shaft, and coming up with the greater strength, killed out the volcanic fires."

"I hardly know which I would rather be immersed in," declared Detective Dyke, "boiling water or lava."

"I think I would take the water," declared De Frontenac.

"There is really little to choose," said Frank. "It is death in either case."

As there was imminent danger of the air-ship being drawn into the gases of the crater by reason of the powerful draughts or currents of air, Frank caused the air-ship to descend upon a flat surface of rock some distance from the crater.

And here it was securely anchored, while the voyagers all took a trip across to the verge of the crater lake.

Only Barney was left aboard the air-ship.

The others, led by Frank, proceeded to explore the mountain top.

No thought had been given to Burton, who was deemed secure in the cabin.

And right here was where a fearful mistake was made.

The villain, during his confinement, had not been idle.

If his captors fancied that he did not meditate escape, they were exceedingly in error, as events proved.

It had been an unwise thing to remove his manacles. To Burton it was a godsend.

The villain had not been idle a moment.

In the stateroom he extracted a steel spike from a portion of the woodwork. With this he had contrived to wear away one of the bars of the grating in his stateroom door.

These were of iron, and yielded easily to the steel. So cleverly was the gap in the iron covered up with a bit of clay which the villain had in some way secured, that it was not noticed.

So now, when all the explorers left the air-ship, and it was resting upon the earth, the villain believed his chance had come.

From his window he saw them leave the air-ship.

He chuckled well at this.

"I'll teach them that John Burton is no fool!" he hissed.

"I'll cheat them of their game yet."

With vengeful declaration, the villain deftly removed the

sawed bar, and putting his arm out through the aperture, shot back the outer bolts.

The door easily swung open, and the escaped murderer crept into the cabin.

As he passed through the gun-room, he took down a brace of pistols and thrust them in his pockets.

Then he crept out upon the deck.

Barney was standing forward and wistfully watching the explorers.

He had been greatly disappointed at his inability to accompany them.

"Begorra, it's a shame!" he muttered. "That naygur jest gits iverything he wants. Ah, welly, me turn will come next."

And as Barney stood there he suddenly heard a slight noise in his rear.

Like a flash he turned.

He was aghast to be confronted by the villain, Burton, who, with a revolver pointed full at him, cried:

"Stand where you are! You are in my power!"

For a moment the Celt was in a quandary. His lion courage would have prompted him to spring full at his foe.

But as he looked into the deadly tube he knew that it held death.

This man was a murderer, and would as soon take his life as not. It would be folly to court that fate.

A thousand terrible reflections passed through Barney's mind.

He realized at once what it meant to have the air-ship fall into the power of this fiend.

The Celt was quite desperate, but what could he do? The native cunning of his shrewd nature asserted itself, and he instantly resolved to resort to stratagem.

"Begorra, I'll fool him!" he muttered to himself. "I'll wait me toime!"

But aloud he said:

"All roight, me frind. Don't shoot, fer I'm yure prisoner."

"That's common sense," said Burton vindictively: "Now, my fine pup, I want you to do just what I tell you and no fooling about it, or, by the justice! I'll kill you!"

"Ye've said that wanst," retorted Barney. "Phwat the divil do yez want av me?"

"You know how to run this ship. Send her up!"

Barney's face paled.

"Shure, an' lave all the rist av thim?" he asked in consternation.

"Yes; of course."

"Och! begorra, I'll niver do that!"

"You won't?" gritted the villain, savagely. "I will give you one minute to make up your mind. If you don't do it you shall die!"

CHAPTER XI.

BARNEY'S BRAVE WORK.

Barney was in a terrible predicament.

He did not wish to go off in this manner and lose his companions. Yet ought he to sacrifice his life?

One moment he hesitated; then the reflection came to him that he could return for them. There was no alternative in any event, so he cried:

"All roight, me frind. I'll do jist as yez tell me."

"See that you do."

Barney started along the platform to the pilot house.

He kept an eye covertly on Burton, hoping to see a chance to down him, but the villain followed him close, holding the revolver at his head.

There was no opportunity, and Barney was reluctantly obliged to press the key and set the wings in motion.

Up sprang the air-ship like a bird. Up, up, over the crater, leaving the others below.

And they upon the verge of the crater heard the movement of the air-ship and looked up to see it sailing away to the southward.

Their astonishment and dismay can hardly be imagined.

"By the powers!" gasped Osman Dyke, "there goes the ship!"

"What is Barney up to?"

"Does he mean to leave us?"

Then one common thought came to all. Had Burton got free and overcome Barney? Was this his work?

"Golly fo' glory!" gasped Pomp. "De Pishman am killed fo' suah. Dis chile ought to bab stayed dar wif him!"

"It never occurred to me that there was risk!" exclaimed Frank. "But we have done wrong in leaving Barney alone."

"True! But it is too late now!" groaned Dyke. "Our man is lost and the air-ship, too!"

"We will not admit that yet," said Frank. "Barney would not give up without a struggle."

"Yet the air-ship is leaving us!"

"It must be in Burton's hands."

"What are we to do?"

Indeed this was a problem of no light sort. Dismayed and indeed overwhelmed by their hard luck, the party remained gazing vacantly after the disappearing air-ship.

And aboard the Era Barney was yet under the deadly muzzle of Burton's revolver.

The villain sat close by the Celt in the pilot-house and directed him how to make the course of the air-ship.

Barney was in an agony of doubt and apprehension.

In vain he groped about for a way out of the dilemma.

In some way he must outwit his captor.

But as matters stood now it was very plain that Burton held the upper hand, and seemed likely to hold it for an indefinite length of time.

The volcanic mountain of Tambobambo was now hidden behind other peaks.

Still Burton compelled Barney to sail the air-ship on.

"You're an Irishman," he said to Barney. "You have wit."

"I'm not ashamed av the green, sor," retorted the Celt.

"Ha, ha! that is good! You have good sense. Now, you will do what I tell you, and I will spare your life. I ought to kill you for my own safety!"

"Bejabers, so far as that goes, yez had better do it!" returned Barney, fearlessly.

"Then you won't make friends with me?"

"Divil a bit. I never looked the company av a snake."

An oath quivered upon Burton's lips, and he seemed for a moment likely to pull the trigger.

But he did not do so.

"I ain't through with you yet," he said; "but you must not give me too much impudence."

"If I cud give yez phwat yez deserve, it would be a bit av rope," returned the Celt, coolly.

Burton was angry, but he only said, in a steely way:

"We've gone far enough."

"Oh, it's to descind, is it?"

"Yes."

Somewhat surprised, Barney at once complied. The air-ship settled down rapidly.

The spot was a lonely plain, yet a path could be seen which seemed to lead into the mountains.

The Celt had divined the villain's purpose.

"He means to take leave av me here!" he muttered.

"Bejabers, I'll niver object to that."

But Burton had a deeper and darker purpose in view.

The air-ship settled down rapidly until it rested upon the plain.

Then Burton arose, saying:

"Put out your anchors."

They went out on deck, Burton yet holding the pistol close to Barney's head. The Celt proceeded to moor the air-ship.

Then Burton said:

"Look here, you impudent rascal! there is dynamite aboard this ship!"

With an awful wave of horror Barney realized the villain's purpose.

For a moment his face was ghostly, but he quickly replied:

"Divil a bit, sor."

"Don't you lie to me. Bring it out here at once!"

"But, sor——"

"You can't deceive me. The dynamite is here and you know it. I know where it is. Come with me!"

For a moment Barney's form quivered. A terrible deadly resolution had half come over him.

But yet again he looked into the deadly muzzle of that death-dealing revolver and knew that he must obey.

Would no opportunity occur for him to turn the tables upon the wretch? He was in despair.

"Shure it's sthark I am!" he reflected. "The black-hearted divil means to blow up the air-ship!"

This was Burton's plan.

By destroying the Era he could end the pursuit of his foes. This would enable him to make good his escape.

What to do with Barney was yet a question to the villain. He had half decided to kill him.

Had the Celt known this he would perhaps have taken a desperate chance long ere this.

But he obeyed his captor, and proceeding to the ammunition locker took out one of the fearful dynamite bombs which were an invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

This Burton carried, and then said:

"Now I want connection made with the dynamos. Lay a wire for me."

Barney could not evade the command.

A cold sweat broke out over the Celt. He mentally resolved to die before he would see the air-ship blown up.

But the time had not yet come for him to act.

So he followed Burton's directions and laid the wire from the dynamo to a safe distance from the air-ship.

A key was provided which could open or close the current, and the connections were made with the bomb which was placed under the air-ship.

But Barney deftly fixed the connections in the key so that it would not work. With a fiendish light in his eyes Burton took the key from Barney's hand.

He pressed it in one hand, but it did not work.

His face turned black.

"What's this?" he hissed. "Have you made the connections right?"

"Yis, sor," replied Barney, coolly. "But yez don't press hard enough on the keys, sor."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

For one supreme instant, in his intentness to accomplish his fiendish purpose, the fiend forgot himself.

He applied both hands to the key.

It was Barney's moment.

The aim of the deadly revolver was diverted for an instant. But that was time enough.

With a howl Barney launched himself upon the murderer.

One quick blow of his hand sent the revolver flying from Burton's grasp.

Then the two men were locked in a deadly embrace.

"Yez dhirty, lyin', thavin' ould vagabond!" yelled the

Celt. "Now I've got the best av yez, an' be me sowl I'll kape it!"

"Curse you!" gritted Burton. "I ought to have killed you!"

Burton was a powerful man, but Barney was a tough little Irishman, and could stand a heap of punishment.

The fight was a most terrific one. Burton tried in every way to down his man.

But Barney hung on to him desperately, and it soon became evident that Burton was tiring.

The Celt seized a good opportunity, and tripping his man, threw him heavily. Over they rolled.

But Barney came out on top.

He was a hustler in a tussel of this kind, and soon he held his man down exhausted and a prisoner.

"Now, be me sowl!" cried Barney, greatly elated, "if yez thry to git away ag'in, I'll kill yez!"

"I yield!" gasped Burton.

Barney swiftly pulled off his coat and bound the villain's hands behind him.

Then he led him aboard the air-ship.

Burton's face was ashen white.

"For God's sake take that bomb out from under the ship!" he cried.

But Barney laughed.

"Shure, if it explodes it'll only take the both av us out av the wurruld, an' that wud be a small loss!" he cried. "Go in there wid yez!"

And the Celt forced his man into a stateroom and locked the door. Then he made sure that Burton could not again escape in the interim, and went out to remove the bomb.

He broke the connection and relegated the bomb again to the locker.

"Upon me sowl!" he muttered. "It was a close call that divil gave me an' the air-ship. But divil a bit will he iver play it on me ag'in."

It was rapidly growing dark, but nothing daunted, the Celt started upon the return to Tambobambo.

He well knew that Frank and the others would be in a fever of excitement and unrest.

"Shure, I'm afther thinkin' they'll be glad to see the air-ship again!" he muttered.

He turned on the searchlight and sent its rays quivering across the mountain peaks.

He was not quite sure of his course to Tambobambo, but nevertheless he kept on at a good pace, looking the while for his friends.

CHAPTER XII.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

The horror and mystification of the party left by the volcano's crater can hardly be described.

"Great Jericho!" gasped Dyke, in dismay. "Now we're in a scrape!"

"It is Burton's work!"

"Certainly," agreed Frank Reade, Jr. "Barney would not go and leave us for any slight reason."

"What shall we do?"

The explorers stood looking blankly at each other.

Truly they were in a fix.

To leave the spot was hardly advisable, for the air-ship might return.

To remain there did not seem very feasible with the lack of provisions.

But fortunately they had their rifles with them.

This would enable them to do such hunting as was necessary to obtain game for food.

A consultation was held, and it was decided to remain on the spot.

All interest was now lost in the volcanic lake.

All spent their time in studying the horizon, vainly waiting the return of the air-ship.

But it did not reappear, and as the time passed darkness most intense came on.

The explorers made a rude camp among the rocks, and prepared to thus spend the night.

Sleep was almost out of the question, for the nerves of all were extremely taut.

But after awhile some of the weary ones lapsed into gentle sleep.

Pomp, however, sat up studying the blackness of the southern sky.

The darky was secretly mourning what he believed was the sure loss of his confrere, Barney.

"Golly, but dis chile am gwine to be drefful lonesome wifout dat I'ishman," he declared. "He jes' had his faults, but all said an' done, he amn't sich a bad fellow as he looked to be."

Thus communing with himself, the darky passed the time away.

But suddenly, as he was studying the dark sky, he gave a violent start.

"Golly!" he gasped. "Wha' am dat? Dat am bery queer!"

To the darky it looked like an enormous star in the horizon. What was more, it was wavering greatly.

"It looks somefin' like a star," he muttered, "but I disremember eber seein' a star act dat way afore!"

Then a sudden idea flashed across him, and he gasped:

"Fo' de Lor', I done believe it am a fac'. Marse Frank! quick sah! I done believe it am de air-ship!"

The startled cry aroused every one in the camp.

In a moment they had sprung up.

"What's the matter with you, Pomp?" asked Frank, sharply.

"Jes' yo look yondah, sah!" cried the darky. "Fo' de lan's sake, I done believe it am dat I'ishman coming back a'right, sah!"

Frank now saw the distant star, as did the others. They gazed at it hard for some moments.

Then Dyke cried:

"Upon my word, Frank, I really believe it is the air-ship!"

"That is good news!"

"Yes; that is the searchlight of the Era, as I live!"

"It seems to be coming this way."

"Yes."

"Barney is looking for us."

"But he'll never find us."

"How can we signal him?"

Instantly De Frontenac cried:

"Build a huge fire."

This idea was embraced instantly.

At once all set to work to pile up a great heap of wood.

There was plenty of this a short distance down the mountain side, stumps and fagots and fallen logs.

These were heaped up and fired.

The blaze shot upward, a literal tower of fire.

It could not help but be seen many miles distant.

Meanwhile, the star of light was rapidly drawing nearer. That it was the searchlight of the ship was certain.

Whether Barney saw their signal fire or not the explorers were not certain, but still the air-ship came on.

And now, back of the glimmering light, a dark body was seen. It was the air-ship.

All doubt was settled.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dyke, excitedly; "it is the air-ship coming back for us!"

The mystery of its leave-taking of course yet remained a mystery.

Every moment now the searchlight became brighter. Soon its pathway of light struck the mountain top.

It was true that Barney had seen the beacon fire.

At first he had thought it flame from an active volcano, but on second thought he recognized its character.

He now bore down with all speed upon Tambobambo, and when at length he was able to focus the searchlight upon the mountain top, he saw some tiny dark forms there.

"Begorra, there they are!" he cried, joyfully. "Shure, it's luck, for me an' for thim, too!"

Down settled the air-ship quickly. Soon it rested upon the mountain side, and with cheers the explorers quickly rushed aboard.

It did not take Barney long to give a faithful account of himself. As he portrayed his experiences, the explorers listened with wonder.

"Mercy on us!" cried Dyke. "You are a hero, Barney; what a big thing for you to outwit the villain that way. Is he safe aboard?"

"Shure, he's locked up all safe!" cried Barney; "but I'd advise ye to git him back to Ameriky, an' hang him as quick as iver ye kin, or the divil will help him to escape ag'in."

Everybody laughed at this, and Frank said:

"We shall all return home at once."

"After a most successful voyage," declared De Frontenac.

"Right there!" cried Dyke.

"I hope you gentlemen are satisfied!" said Frank.

"Why shouldn't we be?" cried De Frontenac. "I visited the hidden nation above the clouds. The greatest object of my life was attained."

"And I bagged my man!" cried Dyke. "Which was my great object."

All were in the happiest of spirits. Daylight was at hand, so nobody went back to sleep.

Good care was taken now that Burton's stateroom was well guarded. Another escape would not be possible.

With the first break of day the air-ship shot up into the sky and took a northward course.

The sky explorers were northward bound.

But they had not yet escaped all perilous adventures. An incident transpired that very day which was of a thrilling sort.

John Burton had by no means given up his plans of escape.

Now that he knew that they were homeward bound and he was every moment drawing nearer to a court of justice, he became doubly desperate.

"They will never hang me!" he gritted. "Curse them! I will cheat the gallows!"

He spent all his time in carefully studying his chances.

Before he had escaped by the door. This was, however, now doubly barred and locked.

He therefore turned his attention to the window.

This he found was a thin frame set in steel. By dint of much exertion and patient labor, he managed to bend the frame and slide the window down.

It left an aperture just large enough for his body to pass through.

He crawled through one dark evening, and swinging downward, grasped the rail. Along this like a monkey he made his way.

But the air-ship was a full thousand feet above the earth. How could he hope to escape?

He could not lower the ship himself, for there in the pilot-house was Barney.

The alarm would be given and he would be recaptured. The murderer was in a desperate frame of mind.

While cowering in the shadows by the rail he was apt to be discovered. But a thrilling idea came to him.

He acted upon it.

His plan was to throw over one of the anchor cables and descend by it to the end.

Somewhere the end of the cable would be apt to touch the earth, when he could disengage himself and be free.

Forward crept the prisoner until he was in the bow.

All of the voyagers were in the main cabin, talking merrily, except Barney, who was at the wheel.

Some motive prompted Detective Dyke to go forward. He advanced with quick, firm steps, but halted suddenly.

A dark, crouching form was by the rail.

It was Burton, and he had just fastened the rope about his waist. It was a thrilling moment.

The detective started forward in surprise, exclaiming:

"Who is that?"

Then another cry pealed from his lips.

"John Burton!"

"Curse you!" gritted the villain, as he tried to slide off the deck; "don't ye put a hand on me!"

But the detective had already gripped him by the throat. In an instant a terrible struggle was in progress.

Dyke had but one thought.

He would never let his man get away. Barney sprang down out of the pilot-house.

He saw the two men struggling and would have taken a hand in the contest.

But before he could do so an awful cry of horror escaped his lips. He saw both men slide, and slip and vanish over the edge of the air-ship's decks.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

Down into space slid the struggling men. But they did not fall to meet the awful death Barney had thought of.

They did not reach the earth. The cable fastened to Burton brought them to a halt.

But there they swung in midair and fighting madly.

In the darkness Barney did not see this, of course. He could realize but one thing, and this was that they had gone down to certain death.

His cries brought all from the cabin in a hurry.

The air-ship was instantly stopped. It was the horrified belief of all that both Dyke and Burton lay mangled and dead a thousand feet below.

"Quick, Barney!" shouted Frank. "Focus the searchlight downward and see if you can locate them."

The Celt required no second bidding.

He hastened to obey.

The searchlight swept the ground below. But the bodies were not seen.

However, De Frontenac, leaning far over the rail, saw the two men dangling in midair, and he cried:

"There they are alive, and hanging on to the anchor rope!"

A glance was enough for Frank.

"Down with the ship, Barney!" he cried.

The Celt rushed into the pilot-house. The air-ship began to descend.

It touched the earth, and there Dyke, the plucky detective, was found hanging on to his man.

The voyagers could not help a cheer. Burton was quickly secured and taken aboard again.

This was the murderer's last attempt at escape.

His courage seemed crushed, and he sullenly resigned himself to his fate.

The air-ship once more sped on its way.

Over Ecuador once more and Colombia, and then came the Caribbean Sea.

The Gulf of Mexico was crossed, and the shores of America once more burst into view.

The famous voyage of the sky explorers over the Andes of South America was at an end.

Back to Readestown went the air-ship. Here Frank Reade found that the frame had become badly twisted, and that it would not be able to stand another long, extended voyage.

"Never mind," he said, philosophically. "I'll build another to beat her. I can do it."

And he at once began work upon some new plans.

Barney and Pomp had enjoyed the South American trip, but, on the whole, were not sorry to get home again.

They resumed their duties about the yard and quickly fell into the old routine.

Osman Dyke, the detective, was a hero when he brought the murderer, Burton, back safely to New York.

It was an achievement of which he had reason to be proud, and won him promotion.

Burton died in the electric chair.

De Frontenac proceeded to write his book upon the hidden nation of the Andes, and at some future day the world will see it.

And thus having reached the end of our narrative, we will beg leave to bid the reader a fond adieu.

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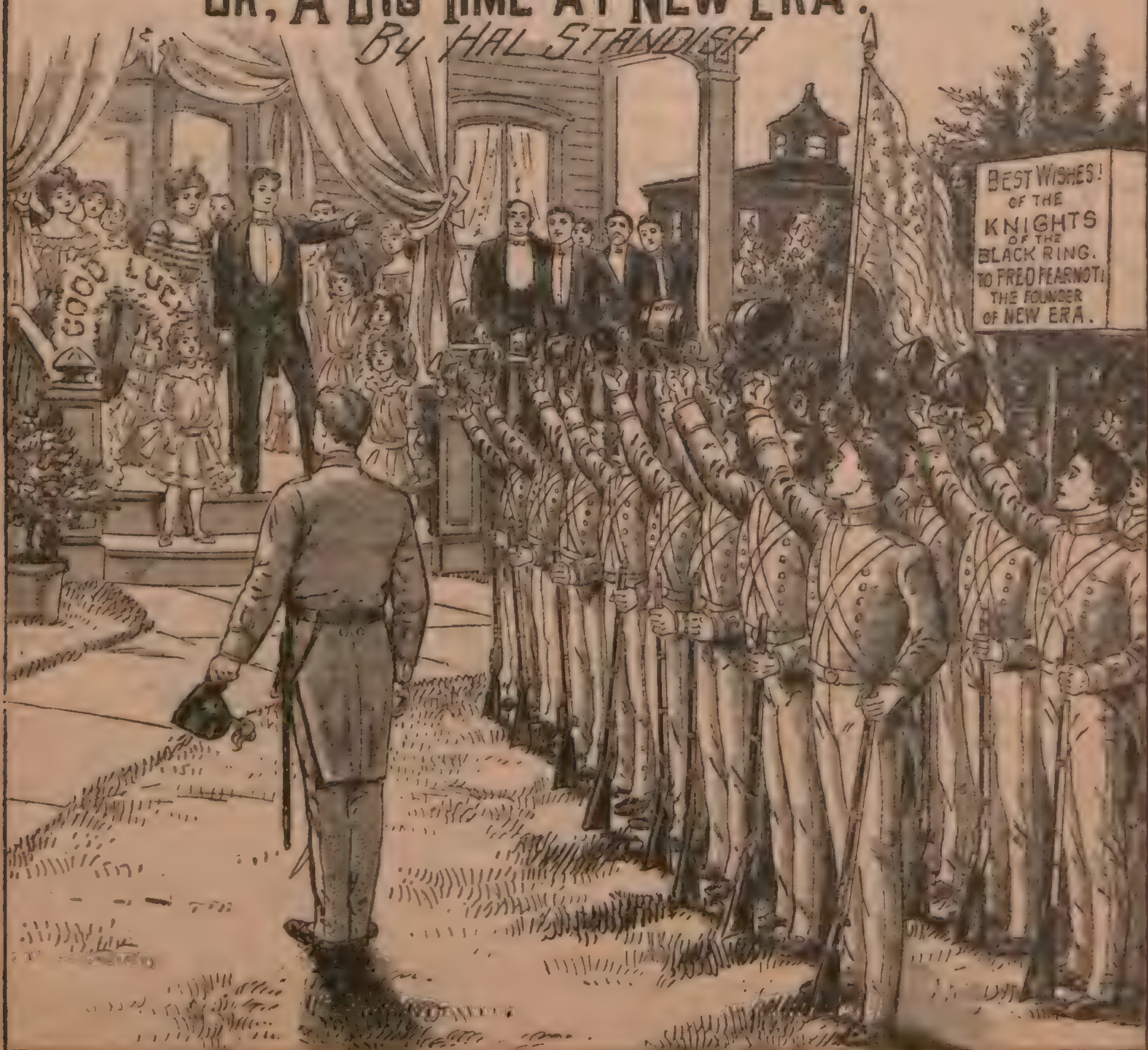
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